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Chairman: Mr. DEKANY (Hungary)
(Vice-Chairman)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 96: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (continued)

(b) QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS (continued)

(c) HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Krenkel (Austria), Mr. Dekany (Hungary), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (continued)

(b) QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS (continued)

(c) HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/47/12 and Add.1, A/47/91-S/23585, A/47/131, A/47/178, A/47/280, A/47/296, A/47/351-S/24357, A/47/352, A/47/364, A/47/365, A/47/391, A/47/420-S/24519, A/47/455-S/24571, A/47/529 and Corr.1, A/47/540, A/47/564, A/47/569 and A/47/638-S/24772)

1. Mr. CRAPATUREANU (Romania) said that, despite the efforts that had been made, the global refugee situation had again deteriorated. The existence of 18 million refugees was totally incompatible with the fundamental goals of the international community. Romania supported the activity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other United Nations agencies and welcomed the adoption of resolution 46/182 on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance.

2. After the fundamental changes that had taken place in eastern Europe, a new situation had emerged affecting the refugee problem at the regional level. After the collapse of communism and the Iron Curtain, the number of persons travelling west had increased at least 10 times. His delegation considered that, in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 Geneva Convention, a clear distinction should be made between refugees and other categories of migrants and asylum-seekers. It also considered that excessive use and misuse of asylum procedures could undermine the refugee institution itself.

3. During the communist period, Romania had been a source of emigrants, but after 1990, the Romanian authorities had had to establish a new legal and institutional framework. The first step had been to establish the Romanian Committee for Migrations, whose main tasks were to apply the international legal instruments and to promote domestic legislation, to take measures to reduce the flow of illegal immigrants, reintegrate returnees, etc. Secondly, a law had been submitted on the status of refugees and had been sent to the Parliament for adoption. In addition, an office of the International Organization for Migration had been opened in Bucharest and, after Romania's accession to the 1951 Convention, an office of UNHCR.

(Mr. Crapatureanu, Romania)

4. Romania had signed agreements with Austria, Germany and Hungary for the repatriation of citizens with illegal status in those countries. He also noted that an inter-ministerial agreement had been signed between Germany and Romania to help repatriated persons receive training in special units. In spite of its lack of experience, Romania had provided humanitarian assistance to the foreigners who applied for asylum, the majority being Somalis and Kurds, and had started a programme, together with UNHCR and the Romanian Red Cross, to offer scholarships and training to those refugees.

5. Mr. KOUYATE (Guinea) said that the changes which had taken place in the world had not opened up the prospects for refugees that had been anticipated. The fact that there were 17 million persons living outside their own countries highlighted the need for innovative approaches. A global strategy must be worked out to prevent and eradicate the main causes of mass migrations: wars and human rights violations.

6. There were, however, other factors: extreme poverty, the consequences of structural adjustment, the debt burden and the fragility of economic systems and institutions, as well as environmental degradation, drought, famine and natural catastrophes. The African countries suffered from all of those, in varying degrees. Accordingly, in 1992, the African Economic Community had been established at Abuja to promote sustainable economic development, through regional and subregional cooperation and integration.

7. Guinea had taken in about 600,000 refugees and resettled them in one of the least developed regions of the country. That mass invasion, so to speak, had caused serious damage, since trees had had to be cut down to provide cultivable land, with adverse effects on water resources. The villages were suffering from serious food shortages because of the drastic increase in population. The Government of Guinea and UNHCR had attempted to launch repatriation operations but had found that, after each operation, those who left for Monrovia did not return and those who went to other provinces came back accompanied by other persons seeking asylum.

8. He praised the efforts of the UNHCR representatives in Guinea. Its cooperation with the Government had made it possible to overcome the difficulties caused by the overwhelming numbers of refugees in poor areas. He also urged the international community to provide assistance for the thousands of persons exposed to disease and lack of hygiene, made worse by the absence of infrastructure and school equipment.

9. Lastly, he expressed the hope that there would soon be positive developments in the situation in Liberia, making it possible to reverse the flow of refugees between that country and the countries of asylum, restore peace and security and return to normal political life. Guinea, which had ratified the Geneva Convention and its Protocol, would take part in that process in accordance with its policy of non-interference, good-neighbourliness and African solidarity.

10. Mr. TROTTIER (Canada) said that Governments, international institutions and non-governmental organizations had to adjust to an evolving geopolitical environment. The United Nations had created the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the new centre for coordination of humanitarian relief, to ensure that all operational agencies were accountable for the effective resolution of the problems plaguing displaced populations.

11. As a result of the horrors taking place in many parts of the world, Canada had had to provide massive humanitarian relief, but the world community as a whole must come to the aid of refugee populations. UNHCR had responded with dedication and innovation, but with massive operations under way, as in Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, the question arose whether it should be asked to take the lead in each case.

12. Canada was aware of the uncertainties that confronted humanitarian relief operations, as well as of the management difficulties for an organization that depended so heavily on responses to special funding appeals. Donors and UNHCR must find a solution to the financial insecurity; only then would the Executive Committee be in a position to be sure that the right priorities were given the right resources. The Canadian International Development Agency had recently offered the services of an independent consultant to undertake a strategic-management review of UNHCR.

13. He wished to pay a tribute to the United Nations and NGO workers who had risked their lives in the performance of their duty, as well as to the soldiers of the United Nations peace-keeping forces who had supported their efforts. Among those who had fallen was a member of the Canadian armed forces, Sgt. Michael Ralph.

14. Canada was a pluralistic country, and therefore found the practice of "ethnic cleansing" to be repugnant and entirely unacceptable. Canada was participating in the United Nations efforts to create conditions that would allow for the return of security, and was providing humanitarian assistance which totalled more than $25 million, in addition to a peace-keeping contingent that would soon number 2,400 men. In response to the High Commissioner's appeal for the protection of former Yugoslavs, Canada had announced special immigration measures for some of the persons concerned, and some 26,000 individuals were expected to be granted asylum in Canada over the next two years.

15. Canada was also contributing to the international efforts to bring humanitarian relief to the Somali people, who were being ravaged by civil war, drought and famine. To date, Canada had provided more than $20 million in humanitarian relief; Canadian aircraft were participating in the airlift into the interior of Somalia, and a contingent of 750 peace-keepers would soon be dispatched to that country. Canada was also participating in efforts to provide protection for refugees through family reunification for Somalis who had close relatives in Canada, or by providing resettlement opportunities in Canada for individual Somalis who could not benefit from other solutions.

(Mr. Trottier, Canada)

16. Canada supported the 100-day programme of action for accelerated humanitarian assistance for Somalia which was drawn up at the meeting held in Geneva on 12 and 13 October. In that connection, his delegation regretted the resignation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Ambassador Sahnoun, and hoped the plan would not suffer any set-backs as a result of that loss.

17. The efforts of the Government of Canada to assist refugees enjoyed the broad support of the population. To maintain that support, however, the policies and programmes for refugees must be firmly based on real needs, and resources must be used rationally. The demands of persons arriving in the nations of the industrialized world seeking protection tested the institutions and collective tolerance of those countries. The time had come to recognize that the world-wide movement of persons was of such magnitude that new and comprehensive approaches must be developed. Canada, which had always been a country of immigration, realized that it was essential to ensure that the admission of refugees rested on a sound legal basis and that strategies to help them to adapt to their new countries were in place. It was equally important to promote tolerance and understanding in the receiving societies.

18. Mr. RATA (New Zealand) said that the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees deserved high praise for its efforts at a time when humanitarian assistance often became impossible as a result of continually increasing needs in situations of rising complexity and danger.

19. New Zealand was disturbed by the contempt which many protagonists in recent conflicts seemed to have for the basic rules of international humanitarian law. The former Yugoslavia was a tragic example. New Zealand had offered asylum to 50 Bosnians who had survived the horror of the detention camps and escaped the abhorrent practice of "ethnic cleansing". His Government strongly believed that those guilty of war crimes should be held accountable for their actions.

20. In Somalia, the uncertain security situation meant that relief was not reaching those who needed it most, and was causing people to flee not only the conflict but the prospect of starvation. His delegation commended the surrounding countries for the sacrifices they were making to assist those refugees.

21. His delegation was pleased to note that over 1.5 million refugees world wide had returned to their homes in 1992, and welcomed the news that around 370,000 Cambodians would have returned home under UNHCR auspices in time for the elections in May 1993. New Zealand was assisting with the rebuilding of Cambodia. In the case of Viet Nam, there had been a phenomenal decline in clandestine departures; his delegation hoped that voluntary repatriation within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees would continue.

(Mr. Rata, New Zealand)

22. The voluntary return of refugees in safety and dignity to their countries was the most desirable solution, although it was not always feasible. Often the country of first asylum was itself poor and lacked the capacity to absorb new arrivals. Resettlement elsewhere might sometimes be the only solution. More than half the refugees accepted in New Zealand under its quota system came from Indo-China. However, in view of the positive developments and the unpredictability of refugee movements, his country had responded to the call by UNHCR, and had set aside a large portion of the quota for cases of protection of refugees of unassigned nationality.

23. New Zealand would once again offer asylum to disabled persons and women at risk, and supported the priority which the Office of the High Commissioner was giving to implementation of the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women. It was appropriate that a Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children should be appointed to complement the work already being done by the Senior Coordinator on Refugee Women.

24. Mr. DUONG CHI DUNG (Viet Nam) said that the world's refugee population, including asylum-seekers, displaced persons and returnees, amounted to 40 million; that, together with the scale, complexity and diversity of the problem, pointed to the gravity of the situation. Viet Nam agreed with the High Commissioner that, despite progress in certain regions, including South-East Asia, the past year had been one of the most difficult and demanding for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), had placed additional and considerable demands on the solidarity of the international community, and had posed daunting challenges to UNHCR and the United Nations system as a whole (A/47/12, para. 1). In that context, he noted with appreciation the implementation of a three-pronged strategy involving improving preparation and response mechanisms in emergencies, seeking lasting solutions, notably through voluntary repatriation, and adopting innovative approaches in the field of prevention.

25. As many speakers had indicated, there were major causes of outflows other than political suppression and human rights violations. Every day millions of people fled their countries in search of a better material life. While underdevelopment, poverty, wars and conflicts were major causes of those outflows, the durable solution to the problem was not only to bring about peace and reconciliation but also to ensure development and prosperity in the regions or countries concerned, a task which called for coordinated action by the United Nations system and the international community.

26. It was noteworthy that at the forty-second session of the Executive Committee, the High Commissioner had been encouraged "to continue with her advocacy of greater inter-agency cooperation and in particular to undertake, with the UNDP Administrator, steps to bring to fruition joint activities in development fields aimed at benefiting refugees, returnees, displaced persons and their host communities" (A/47/12, para. 61).

(Mr. Duong Chi Dung, Viet Nam)

27. Owing to the contant efforts and firm measures of the Government of Viet Nam, assisted by UNHCR and the international community, progress had been made in implementing the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), adopted at the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees. There had been a noticeable decrease in the number of clandestine departures; the Orderly Departure Programme had been expanded; and the number of Vietnamese seeking asylum in Hong Kong and the countries of South-East Asia had decreased steadily. While voluntary repatriation and repatriation of those not opposed to returning had increased during the same period, that enterprise had to be accompanied by development assistance ensuring adequate living conditions for the returnees and the communities involved. In that connection, Viet Nam appreciated the help of the European Community as well as other governmental and non-governmental organizations in implementing the Comprehensive Plan of Action.

28. Mr. KHOMAN (Thailand) said that the problem of refugees in South-East Asia was a consequence of the Vietnamese war fiasco. The victors in that ignominious war had conceived of what might be called the precursor of the Serbian "ethnic cleansing", since the communist regime and its allies had driven out the Chinese population not only for lucrative gains but also for political purposes.

29. The refugee flow had increased after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia to such a large extent that the Thai Government had been unable to cope with it. In spite of that, western Governments had devised the term "first asylum", a machiavellian device which had assuaged their consciences, freed them from all responsibility and placed the burden on the shoulders of poor and underdeveloped countries like Thailand. Particularly disgraceful was the fact that the theory had no longer applied when the Haitians began landing on the Florida coast, since at that point the authorities had advanced the distinction between political and economic refugees, an ingenious notion invented by the British. President-elect Bill Clinton, who should be commended for his fairness and political honesty, had recognized that ploy as an "error".

30. To maintain an image of moral virtue and responsibility, those western countries had pledged to admit some refugees but, naturally, on particular conditions. After a rigorous screening, they accepted the able-bodied only, leaving the sick, young and old to the care of countries in the vicinity of the conflict. Owing to United Nations efforts, humanitarian assistance from several States and the cooperation of certain Cambodian factions, the refugee situation in South-East Asia was less acute. Implementation of the Paris peace agreement was in its second phase, a period which would require greater determination from all parties in order to bring lasting peace to Cambodia. The Government of Thailand, the Supreme National Council of Cambodia and UNHCR had signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding which ensured that there would be no residual refugee cases remaining in Thailand. The Cambodian repatriation operation had progressed satisfactorily and it was to be hoped

(Mr. Khoman, Thailand)

that it would be completed by early 1993 so that all Cambodians might participate in the Cambodian general election in May of that year. In that connection, the generous contribution of the Japanese Government and the valuable efforts of the United Nations and the international community were noteworthy.

31. Nevertheless, having begun the repatriation process, the international community must not be oblivious to the importance of contributing to the well-being of returnees and to their adequate reintegration into society, in order to ensure a lasting peace in Cambodia.

32. Implementation of a plan for phased repatriation and reintegration of Lao refugees from Thailand, agreed upon in 1991 by the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and UNHCR, had facilitated the voluntary return of many Laotians to their country. That plan also required support from the international community in order to increase the Republic's capacity to absorb returnees.

33. Thailand wished to point out that, while progress had been made under the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), the parties concerned should explore new mechanisms and modalities to speed up the repatriation of persons not considered refugees, in accordance with international practice and, to that end, it urged UNHCR to convene the CPA Steering Committee.

34. Mrs. JAHAN (Bangladesh) said that, while the end of the cold war had brought with it much progress and many new opportunities, giving rise to a sense of euphoria, it had also resulted in serious problems, such as that of refugee populations, which could threaten international political stability.

35. The enormous flow of refugees not only endangered political relations between States but also imposed severe economic burdens on host countries. Escalating ethnic and civil violence, which took its greatest toll on thousands of innocent people, could be contained only through concerted action by the international community which ensured, inter alia, that emergency humanitarian assistance reached its destination.

36. Until recently, ideological disputes between nations had hindered any solution to, or had exacerbated, the refugee problem in Asia, Africa and Latin America and, while it had facilitated the search for solutions and had given rise to some progress, as in the case of Afghan and Cambodian refugees, the new international climate had also contributed to the emergence of new conflicts in eastern and central Europe. It was vital to reverse those trends and to place greater stress on prevention.

37. The refugee issue was of particular significance to Bangladesh, which had welcomed more than 265,000 refugees from Myanmar. Despite its meagre resources, it had been able, with the help of the international community, to meet the immediate demands arising from that situation.

(Mrs. Jahan, Bangladesh)

38. An indefinite stay of the refugees in Bangladesh would only heighten tensions and increase competition with the local population for scarce resources, which could give rise to conflict. Bangladesh and Myanmar had accordingly decided to settle the question peacefully in a spirit of friendship and good neighbourliness and had signed an agreement by which Myanmar had agreed to guarantee return of the refugees and to ensure a secure and dignified future for them. Although the process had been slow, it was to be hoped that it marked the beginning of voluntary repatriation of the remaining refugees and, in that connection, the impartial presence of the United Nations was essential.

39. Bangladesh was aware of the enormous responsibility carried by UNHCR and the importance of providing it with the funds necessary to fulfil its mandate. It therefore called upon the international community to strengthen its cooperation with UNHCR and to combat the root causes of those problems so that such situations did not recur.

40. Mr. KASOULIDES (Cyprus) said that, as one of the beneficiaries of UNHCR's humanitarian assistance, Cyprus was very much aware of the need to guarantee protection and assistance to the 17 million refugees as well as to displaced persons throughout the world.

41. In Europe, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, which was largely attributable to the dissolution of the eastern European States and to the destructive trends of militant ethnic fervour and nationalism, was approaching epidemic proportions and rivalled conditions in Africa and Asia.

42. Cyprus, itself a victim of the abhorrent practice of "ethnic cleansing" had supported the Committee resolution condemning that practice as a gross violation of international humanitarian law, and believed that positive political developments could help to solve the problem of refugees and allow them to return to their homes in safety.

43. As prevention was the most suitable means of addressing the overall problem, a better understanding of the root causes of mass exoduses was necessary in order to help the High Commissioner expand the preventive functions of her Office, and to strengthen the United Nations mechanisms and procedures for determining conflicts, negotiating solutions to international conflicts and improving the human rights situation. Prevention of the refugee problem also required States to fulfil their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, respect the human rights of their own citizens and refrain from the threat or use of force against other States.

44. Cyprus supported the new Emergency Preparedness and Response Mechanism; the institution of five Emergency Response Teams; the stockpiling of food reserves; the adoption of procedures for rapid deployment of personnel and resources and the creation of an early-warning system for possible refugee migrations. Cyprus also supported an integrated approach which included the

(Mr. Kasoulides, Cyprus)

participation of development agencies, and linked refugee assistance and development aid.

45. Voluntary repatriation was the ideal solution to the problem, although it depended on acceptable economic and political conditions, as well as safety, in the countries of origin. Moreover, voluntary repatriation inevitably meant increased funds. It was gratifying that for the first time contributions made to UNHCR in 1991 had enabled it to respond to emergencies and to implement large-scale repatriation programmes without financial constraints. Nevertheless, it was necessary to seek further resources in order to boost the capacity of poor developing countries to offer hundreds of thousands of refugees asylum and resettlement.

46. Recent history had demonstrated the need to revise the definition of the term "refugee". The 1951 Convention defined a refugee as a person compelled to leave his country on account of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order. However, it was necessary to bear in mind that individuals also fled from poverty, ecological disaster and lack of development.

47. The United Nations should address more closely the issue of internally displaced persons, who were forced to become refugees in their own countries and who, as a result, remained outside the protection of the 1951 Convention. In that context, his delegation pointed out that it was inadmissible for national sovereignty to be used as an excuse for preventing displaced persons from receiving international assistance. In order to address the problem of displaced persons, it would be useful to distinguish between persons who were "internally" displaced because of internal developments within a country and "externally" displaced persons, i.e. people forcibly expelled from where they lived by foreign occupation or invasion.

48. Hundreds of thousands of Cypriots belonged to that latter category. During the invasion and subsequent occupation of 37 per cent of the territory of Cyprus, about one third of the population had been compelled to leave their homes and to move to areas controlled by the current Government. That was a manifest violation of international humanitarian law and more specifically of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Eighteen years later, the occupation forces were still present in Cyprus and much of the land in the occupied part had been given to settlers illegally imported in large numbers from Turkey in an effort to change the demographic structure of the occupied territory.

49. That situation had been confirmed by the fact-finding mission sent to Cyprus by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography of the Council of Europe and had also been condemned by the European Commission of Human Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

50. In order to assist the Secretary-General in solving the problem of Cyprus, the Government had accepted the suggestion to conduct a census to

(Mr. Kasoulides, Cyprus)

determine living conditions in all regions, the number of people living in Cyprus and where they came from. Unfortunately, the Turkish Cypriot side had rejected that initiative.

51. Cyprus was grateful to the Secretary-General for persevering in his efforts and for continuing to maintain a special mission of UNHCR in Cyprus to coordinate international assistance. It was also grateful to the international community, to donor countries and to UNHCR and hoped that the good offices mission entrusted to the Secretary-General by the Security Council would result in a just and lasting solution to the problem of Cyprus.

52. Mr. SHOOGUFAN (Afghanistan) supported and commended the continued efforts of UNHCR and other humanitarian bodies towards providing assistance to refugees and displaced persons and towards seeking durable solutions.

53. In Afghanistan, 14 years of war had forced one third of the population to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and 2 million people to leave their homes and settle in other parts of the country. The end of the war and the political changes initiated in 1992 had established conditions suitable for the repatriation of Afghan refugees to begin and for displaced persons to return to their homes. Over one million refugees had already returned to their towns and villages, and despite many obstacles, particularly the presence of ten million mines all over the country, massive repatriation was expected to take place as from March 1993.

54. In order to facilitate the massive return and resettlement of the refugees the following requirements had to be met: continuation of the financial and technical arrangements agreed upon by UNHCR, other assistance agencies and the neighbouring countries in support of refugee programmes, such as tranportation programmes to repatriate persons from places a long way from Afghanistan; the provision of material assistance to communities and the preparation of stocks of food, blankets, fuel for stoves and essential health items; the implementation of rehabilitation and development projects designed to generate economic activities in places to which people returned; mine clearance throughout the country's territory, as the problem had hitherto not been adequately addressed and was a real hurdle to voluntary repatriation.

55. The recently established Tripartite Repatriation Commission, consisting of UNHCR and the Governments of Afghanistan and Iran, and a similar commission to be established with UNHCR and Pakistan would make it possible to improve refugee protection and repatriation.

56. Afghanistan wished to express its profound gratitude to UNHCR, Iran, Pakistan and all the Member States and international bodies for their generous assistance to Afghan refugees and displaced persons, and it called upon the international community to support the Government of Afghanistan in its labour of repatriation, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

57. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that the problem of refugees and displaced persons seemed to be constantly increasing in magnitude and complexity. The Holy See wished to pay tribute to UNHCR for its efforts in providing international protection to refugees and in seeking durable solutions to their problems. The High Commissioner's three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions deserved to be energetically pursued.

58. For its part, the Holy See continued to inspire and support a wide range of activities and programmes through the local churches, and it was doing everything possible to promote international solidarity. For example, it had published a document on the refugee issue aimed at focusing international attention on one of the major causes of mass exoduses: violation of human rights with impunity.

59. The definition of "refugee" given by the 1951 Convention should be revised to include victims of erroneous economic policies and natural disasters. However, those who emigrated to improve their financial or social position should not be considered refugees and should be treated differently from those who fled economic conditions that threatened their physical safety.

60. With respect to refugee assistance, people displaced within their own countries had the right to the same consideration as refugees. Moreover, refugees receiving international assistance were not passive objects, but subjects capable of producing and creating; and respect for the rights and dignity of refugees was essential to preventing their tragic situation from being used for political purposes.

61. The Holy See called for international solidarity and generosity and appealed to all people of good will to assist in alleviating and solving the problem of refugees.

62. Mr. RANASINGHE (Sri Lanka) said that, although the end of the cold war had had a positive impact on the situation of refugees around the world, new migration problems had arisen. The root causes were internal and external conflicts, natural and environmental disasters, persecution, deprivation, hunger and poverty. Furthermore, the response to the problems of displaced persons was being complicated by obvious manifestations of racism and xenophobia, which were not confined to any geographical or economic region of the world.

63. He praised the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and her staff in fulfilling their mandate, sometimes at the risk of their own lives, in crisis situations in which the distinction between political and humanitarian issues was not clear. That dilemma highlighted the fact that the strength of UNHCR undoubtedly lay in its neutral, non-political character, which ensured that it would provide protection and seek durable solutions that would dove-tail with domestic political solutions and the national development effort. His delegation endorsed the High Commissioner's forward-looking,

(Mr. Ranasinghe, Sri Lanka)

three-pronged strategy for dealing with the causes of the displacement of persons, which the international community would soon have to address.

64. At the invitation of the Government of Sri Lanka, UNHCR had participated in the provision of humanitarian assistance to Sri Lankans displaced by terrorist violence in the northern and eastern parts of the country. It was implementing pragmatic, flexible provisions through the establishment of Open Relief Centres in the affected areas. Cooperative arrangements had been developed among the Government, UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and local and international non-governmental organizations in order to provide effective, essential services to displaced persons. That humanitarian programme's delivery, funded by the Government of Sri Lanka at a cost of $5 million and involving the distribution of around 10,000 tons of relief supplies per month, was a testimony to both the innovative capacity of UNHCR and the dedication of its staff. The Government of Sri Lanka wished to thank the donor Governments for their generosity, which had been crucial to the success of that operation.

65. UNHCR was also participating in the implementation of bilateral arrangements between Sri Lanka and India aimed at ensuring the voluntary return of displaced Sri Lankan nationals living in South India. The objective was to resettle the returnees in their original places of residence in areas where the Government had restored normal conditions. The programme included a settling-in allowance, an enterprise grant, a housing grant and a quota for consumption.

66. The Government of Sri Lanka was continuing its efforts to find a political solution to the problems in the north and east with the participation of all the democratic political parties of all the country's communities. The objective was to persuade those engaged in terrorist violence to participate in the political process and face democratic elections. A political solution worked out through the negotiating mechanism established by the elected Parliament of Sri Lanka and, combined with economic development, remained the only means of eliminating the causes of displacement.

67. Mr. RAMISHVILI (Russian Federation) said that it was important to acknowledge the efforts made by the international humanitarian relief organizations to deal with today's vast, complex problems despite their considerable financial difficulties.

68. Europe had until very recently been the most stable region in the world. Today its problems with refugees had joined the long-standing refugee problems of Africa, Central America and South-East Asia. Unfortunately, the resurgence of nationalism, long suppressed by force and now given free rein, was not always a peaceful phenomenon. The Russian Federation had not escaped the problem of refugees and displaced persons. Inter-ethnic conflicts in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia

(Mr. Ramishvili, Russian Federation)

and other republics of the former Soviet Union had forced more than 400,000 people to flee to the Russian Federation. Their numbers would very likely be swelled by tens of thousands of Russian nationals in neighbouring countries who were being denied citizenship. Furthermore, within the Russian Federation itself, there were around 700,000 people who, for one reason or another, had been displaced from their place of origin.

69. Refugee protection was a new problem for Russia. A few months previously, the Federal Migration Office had been established, and provisional decrees had been approved regulating the status of refugees and displaced persons. Despite its well-known economic difficulties, the Government of the Russian Federation had allocated 3 billion roubles for that purpose. But more was needed.

70. Since the emergence of the new Russian State, close cooperation had been established with the international humanitarian organizations. During the current year, agreements had been signed with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which were already represented in Moscow. Under those agreements, Russia would be able to draw on international experience in organizing activities related to refugees and displaced persons and would be receiving advice and technical support for the training of personnel and the formulation of draft legislation and national programmes in that field, and for seeking practical solutions to humanitarian issues, including illegal immigration.

71. The Russian Federation lacked legal instruments on the subject. The Parliament was considering a number of draft laws on refugees and migrants, drawn up with the participation of UNHCR experts and international specialists. The President of the Russian Federation had proposed to the Supreme Council the Russian Federation's accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto, subject to parliamentary approval.

72. His delegation was of the view that there were certain problems that should not be neglected by the international humanitarian organizations, even if they did not fall strictly within their mandate. A case in point was that of the Afghan refugees. Despite progress in the repatriation of Afghans, the continuing military activity in Afghanistan had led to a massive exodus of Afghans from the capital to other parts of the country and abroad. Some 20,000 Afghans had settled in the Russian Federation. In the programme for Afghanistan, account should be taken of that aspect of the problem, especially since most of those persons wished to move to a third country.

73. The Russian Federation would welcome a study by UNHCR, IOM, the Department headed by Mr. Eliasson, ICRC and other relevant organizations of the regions in which refugee flows might occur, so as to develop a set of measures to prevent refugee flows or at least to restrict them to certain geographical areas and to reduce such flows throughout the world.

(Mr. Ramishvili, Russian Federation)

74. With regard to the links between refugee problems and cases of statelessness (A/47/12, para. 18), his delegation considered that such cases should be averted. A mechanism should be established to coordinate the humanitarian organizations' programmes and the international community's efforts to find a political solution to conflicts. Preventive measures in that sphere could be based on flexible mechanisms that would serve as a check and would have a humanitarian effect in conflict situations through reliable early warning.

75. The problems faced both by refugees and by the host countries, such as difficulties in adjusting to a new situation, language or cultural barriers, manifestations of racism or xenophobia in everyday life, delinquency and other problems, called for coordinated efforts by the humanitarian organizations and the other organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and regional organizations; such coordination should be a permanent feature and should not be confined merely to exchanges of views.

76. At the moment there was not a single staff member of UNHCR from the Russian Federation. Such was not his country's objective per se, but it needed qualified specialists who would be in a position to put the experience gained from work with UNHCR into practical effect on their return. Practice showed that no one knew more about actual conditions in a place than someone who had been born there. His delegation hoped that the Office appreciated that situation and the practical needs of the Russian Federation.

77. Mr. SUKAYRI (Jordan) said that discussions on the new international humanitarian order had been useful and constructive and had contributed to the search for durable solutions to ever-increasing humanitarian problems in all parts of the world. The growth of those problems called for a stronger response on the part of the international community; greater political will, more substantial financial resources and innovative solutions were needed to address that difficult task.

78. Policies, strategies and actions had little value if they failed to promote human welfare, a primary concern of his delegation. Draft resolution A/C.3/47/L.37, which his delegation was submitting to the Committee at the current session, was a synthesis of previous resolutions adopted by the General Assembly without a vote. In the first place, it was important to have a broad framework within which to discuss and consider various options for action in respect of humanitarian problems which the international community might have neglected or inadequately addressed. The variety of subjects to which delegations had referred and the different resolutions adopted previously were proof of the merits of what might be termed an "umbrella item". His delegation believed that the item should be maintained and should be given greater attention.

79. His delegation wished, furthermore, to convey its gratitude to UNHCR and its appreciation for the work of the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian

(Mr. Sukayri, Jordan)

Issues which, as a follow-up mechanism of the Independent Commission, had continued the work of research, reflection and dissemination, despite financial difficulties. Its efforts had resulted in the publication of some 60 reports in various languages on subjects ranging from desertification and street children to norms of international humanitarian law, and a series of television documentaries had been prepared for third-world networks.

80. His delegation also wished to point out that the draft resolution had no budgetary implications and imposed no obligations of any kind on Member States. The draft resolution constituted a merger of General Assembly resolutions 45/101 and 45/102, relating to the humanitarian order and to international cooperation in the humanitarian field, and expressed its deep appreciation to the delegation of the Russian Federation and the other sponsors for their cooperation and assistance in merging the two resolutions into a single document.

81. His delegation was convinced that it was only through a humanitarian approach and a humane attitude that contemporary crises could be resolved, since no humanitarian principles or legal norms could be useful if they were not properly implemented. At the same time, he trusted that collective efforts in the Committee and at the World Conference on Human Rights would lead to concrete action in the humanitarian field.

82. Mr. HASSENI (Algeria) said that the fact that there were 18 million refugees demonstrated the increasingly international scale of the problem. The need to address the question of massive population movements was particularly critical since the relevant international instruments, the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, did not cover the new categories of persons seeking asylum or refuge. It was with that in mind that the report of UNHCR dwelt on the need for new approaches and new tools to guarantee the protection of refugees, who were no longer fleeing only persecution but also desperate political, economic and environmental conditions.

83. The third-world countries had the highest concentration of refugees in the world, and in most of them the infrastructure was inadequate even for their own inhabitants. The refugee burden was consequently a difficult one for them to bear.

84. According to the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/47/529), the refugee problem on that continent, where approximately half of the world's refugees were situated, exceeded the capacity of UNHCR and called for a concerted approach by the United Nations system and the international community.

85. He noted with satisfaction the establishment of the mechanisms provided for under General Assembly resolution 46/182 and the recent initiatives on behalf of Somalia and the countries of southern Africa affected by the drought. It was also gratifying to note the complete implementation of the

(Mr. Hasseni, Algeria)

provisions of that resolution concerning the principle of respect for the sovereignty of the beneficiary State and the need to have its prior consent for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

86. Such assistance, however necessary it might be, was but the most urgent aspect of the problem. The international community must tackle the profound causes of population exoduses, which to a large extent, were the result of extreme poverty, want and hunger, which, in turn, were subject to macroeconomic factors such as deterioration of the terms of trade, debt burden and the effects of structural adjustment.

87. Algeria assumed its responsibilities with regard to receiving, housing and assisting refugees, particularly Saharans. In view of the delay in the timetable for holding the referendum in Western Sahara, the needs of those refugees were still great. In that regard, he drew attention to the assessment made by the High Commissioner, who had underscored the need to give greater attention to certain areas such as health, nutrition, housing and transport.

88. Ms. SIMONE (Armenia) said that her country was greatly concerned about the problem of refugees, whose numbers had increased to over 18 million. For the first time since the Second World War, there were over 3 million refugees and displaced persons in Europe as a result of the abhorrent practice of "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia.

89. Armenia understood only too well the refugee problem because, since 1988, it had had to absorb 350,000 persons that had fled from Azerbaijan as a result of serious human rights violations and the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh. In addition to that crisis, 500,000 Armenians had been displaced as a result of the devastating earthquake in 1988.

90. The refugee problem was a top priority for her Government. However, owing to the blockades imposed by Azerbaijan on Armenia, assistance had been diverted. Despite the ensuing difficulties for the population and, particularly, the refugees, her Government was focusing its attention on the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons.

91. Armenia supported a multifaceted and integrated approach. She welcomed the close cooperation between UNHCR and other relevant United Nations agencies in the former Yugoslavia and the Horn of Africa. UNDP, UNICEF and other development agencies could facilitate the Office's activities.

92. Armenia fully supported the preventive efforts of UNHCR. Increasing humanitarian assistance in vulnerable areas and strengthening human rights mechanisms would help improve the conditions that led to movements of people. She also welcomed the progress in enhancing the Office's capacity to respond to emergency situations and the possibility of resolving many refugee situations through voluntary repatriation.

93. Mr. HASSANOV (Azerbaijan) said that the magnitude and gravity of the refugee problem required greater support for the commendable work of UNHCR and focusing attention on assistance of a purely humanitarian and non-political nature. The establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs had undoubtedly enhanced the effectiveness of the Organization's work to solve the serious problems confronting the international community in view of the instability caused by the great changes in recent years, which, in turn, had led to unprecedented migration flows threatening world peace and security.

94. The international community must analyse the causes of those emergency situations, deal with them and attempt to prevent their occurence. The refugee problem was usually associated with foreign aggression and occupation, military conflict, territorial claims and questions related to the redrawing of frontiers. It was the duty of the international community to eliminate those causes; and since humanitarian assistance alone would not suffice in order to solve those problems, there would be a need for greater coordination among the humanitarian agencies and political bodies.

95. Unfortunately, the democratic transformation of the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe had not strengthened peace in that vast area but rather, on the contrary, the leaders of some countries, pursuing pernicious designs, had violated the territorial rights of other countries in order to satisfy their own ambitions. Today, those peoples were the victims once again of the crime of genocide, in the case in question under the name of "ethnic cleansing". Azerbaijan agreed with the statement by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights concerning the situation in the former Yugoslavia that "ethnic cleansing does not appear to be the consequence of the war, but rather its goal" (A/47/635, para. 6).

96. Regrettably, that phrase applied not only to Yugoslavia; and the international community had still not reacted with the necessary speed required also by other long-standing conflicts. In the case of the territories of the former Soviet Union, perhaps the international community still considered that it was a question of internal problems.

97. There were more than one million refugees and displaced persons between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, of whom almost half a million were situated in Azerbaijan as a result of the military conflict with Armenia and the occupation of a large part of the territory of Azerbaijan. Although much had been said about the way to settle the conflict, Azerbaijan, since it had no territorial claims, was focusing its efforts on achieving a single objective, namely, the liberation of its occupied territories in order to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of two neighbouring States and the return of the refugees to their homes.

98. The situation in the region necessarily affected the economy as well as the social and moral conditions of society. Although the assistance of international agencies could help alleviate the difficulties caused by those problems, Azerbaijan was not accustomed to living solely on the basis of

(Mr. Hassanov, Azerbaijan)

well-intentioned foreign assistance since it was a country of great economic potential which could, in spite of the difficult transition that it was experiencing, guarantee means of subsistence for the refugee victims of the conflict and the inhuman policy of ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, in view of its lack of experience in that field, Azerbaijan was forced to request aid from international agencies in the form of humanitarian assistance. In that connection, he drew attention to the recent visit to Azerbaijan by a group of United Nations experts to evaluate the situation and determine the best way of providing concrete assistance to the refugees and displaced persons and coordinate cooperation by UNHCR and other United Nations bodies in that and other important fields.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.